

The
AQUINO
MANAGEMENT
Of The
PRESIDENCY



Power To The Regions

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Foreword

"OURS IS A government that came to power borne on the shoulders of our people; we must, therefore, govern on the basis of that same people power".

These were the very words of President Corazon C. Aquino - words that laid the foundation of the highest office of the land. For six years and four months, her people-powered presidency reflected itself in the very nature of the executive branch and on the implementation of several projects closest to the President's heart; closest, because they touched the warp and woof of our people's aspirations.

To document in part her people-powered presidency, we have compiled this series of volumes titled *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*. The first part of the series attempts to outline the evolution of the support offices and the various management tools and technology employed in the decision-making and decision dissemination processes in the Office of the President. The second part of the series, to which this volume belongs, provides a chronicle of some specific undertakings initiated by the Office of the President which, now, constitute part of the legacies of the Aquino government. The third part of the series is a summation of the Aquino government's performance during its six years in office.

This volume, "Power To The Regions", details the ways by which the President ensured the institution of the people's hard-won democracy. Through

various obstacles posed by political factions, self-interests, ideological and even cultural differences, she had remained steadfast in her desire to bring down to the people the instruments of power. Such that genuine freedom shall be in the hands of all Filipinos; not only during her time, but for generations to come.

This series of volumes, *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*, is by no means a complete coverage of the legacies of the Aquino presidency. Some of those not documented here are contained in materials better covered by other line agencies or academic groups.

Some of President Aquino's legacies, however, will find no archive to preserve them for posterity. One would have to look at the faces and listen to the hearts of the people she touched in order to find them.

Aniceto M. Sobrepeña

Cabinet Secretary

and

Head, Presidential Management Staff

"I am convinced that if this country is to move forward, to grow at a rate and pace consistent with the aspirations of our people, we have to decentralize much of that authority wielded by the national government, and your national government is taking steps to remedy the overly-centralized system we inherited from the past regime. . .

We must continuously move together towards making every municipality a self-reliant community with the local chief executive empowered and provided with enough resources to truly manage on his own".

President Corazon C. Aquino

1989 National Mayor's League
of the Philippines

Folk Arts Theater

June 10, 1989

Introduction

CORAZON C. AQUINO was swept into power because the people had decided that the previous ruler had overreached his powers and had overextended his stay. Although it was true that there was a constitution in place, Marcos operated above it and practically outside of it. His prerogatives were such that he could supercede legislation at a stroke of a pen.

To the dictator and his wife, Malacañang was the center of things. From it emanated the true, the good, and the only vision and direction that would set the Filipinos free from their centuries of indolence. There was that deliberate effort to manipulate the minds of the people – for them to believe that they would be helpless without the imperial presidency continuing, forever.

But the Filipinos knew better. They spoke at EDSA and decreed that primacy of the people must prevail. And what were the Filipino people but a rich tapestry of cultures, dialects, traditions and regions? In modern development paradigms, these differences must be considered and respected to achieve unity and progress.

Owing to the revolutionary fervor in the aftermath of EDSA, the new President had the mandate of her people to bestow upon herself authoritarian powers if she so wished. But instead, she ordered the creation of a constitutional commission to write

a new democratic framework, to rebuild a nation with its people participating in governance.

In his 20 years as Philippine president, Marcos methodically centralized power. The delineation between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the previous government seemed indistinguishable. President Aquino had to turn the system inside out, bottom to top. She meant to shed central power and distribute it among her people. She never wavered on this overwhelming drive.

The President consistently pursued the devolution of the traditional seat of power, and all throughout her reign, decentralization was systematically implemented. The Constitution of 1987, ratified overwhelmingly by the people, was very definite about conferring more authority to local governments and autonomy to regions which, due to historical, cultural, and political imperatives, wished to pace their own development tighter.

The Constitutional Commission which drafted the 1987 Constitution included three prominent Muslims and other representatives from cultural communities. The composition was such that it represented a wide range of sectors. To a man, the commissioners aimed to empower the local governments.

The new Constitution says: "The state shall ensure the autonomy of local governments" and that, "The Congress shall enact a local government code which shall provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure instituted through a system of decentralization".

Following these provisions, the Aquino government (1) established the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera Administrative Region, (2) strengthened the Regional Development Councils, and (3) effected the Congress-enacted Local Government Code.

Thus, the era of grassroots planning and responsibility began.

Autonomous Regions

THE AIR WAS thick with tension. Maimbung, Sulu was full of fierce-looking men armed to the teeth. Government soldiers filled one half of the town, while Muslim secessionists controlled the other. It was September 1986, and the battle-weary town was expecting an unusual guest. For the first time in the history of the nation, its President was about to land in the heart of conflict. She was either insane or very fearless, indeed.

President Aquino broke protocol and personally met Nur Misuari, Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) on that day. The unprecedented move manifested the President's resolve to exhaust all peaceful means to achieve the peace which eluded Mindanao for so many years. It was a significant breakthrough, marking the first step in the peace process.

In his eyeball-to-eyeball meeting with the President, Misuari agreed to cease hostilities and sit down with the government on how to arrive at a political solution. And as a further proof of government's sincerity, Misuari was allowed to hold consultations in Mindanao.

The Muslim's dream of establishing their own Bangsa is deeply rooted in history, dating back to the Spanish and American periods. The Muslims, as a people, have fought against the superior forces of foreign colonizers.

The Americans particularly found the Muslims very tough. It is legend that the would-be colonizers invented the powerful .45 caliber pistol to subdue the warriors, but failed. Instead, they opted for a stalemate.

More specifically, the Tausogs of Sulu have the distinct honor to be the only tribe which had entered into a treaty with the government of the United States of America. The Bates Treaty recognized the religious rights of the Muslims and respected their culture and tradition in exchange for the Muslim recognition of American authority.

In the 1950s, President Ramon Magsaysay opened the frontiers of Mindanao to other Filipino migrants. Cebuanos, Ilongos, Ilocanos, and even the Ivatans from Batanes found the land very rich. As the farms and the residential communities spread, the Muslims found themselves marginalized.

To compound the situation, the long neglect by government of the welfare of Filipino Muslims in Mindanao had resulted in bitterness and resentment from these people, eventually leading to the formation of the Muslim Secessionist Movement.

President Marcos also tried the armed response. In bitter, bloody wars of brothers that became full blown upon the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972, thousands of lives and properties had been lost. Yet there was no solution in sight.

President's Commitment: Muslim Mindanao

Soon after assuming office, President Aquino immediately directed the resumption of talks with the leaders of the MNLF. The President considered the resolution of the Muslim secessionist problem as one of her priorities.

But while the Aquino administration committed itself to accommodate the just aspirations of the Filipino Muslims for real and meaningful autonomy, it stood firm on a policy which dictated that this must be done within the framework of democracy and national sovereignty and must not, in any way, prejudice the territorial integrity of the Republic.

The meeting with the President and Misuari led to what is known as the Jeddah Accord. Three months after the pivotal meeting in Sulu, the President sent then Minister of Local Governments Aquilino Pimentel to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to expand the groundworks for Muslim autonomy with Misuari. The Jeddah Accord called for the continuance of "discussion of the proposal for the grant of full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan subject to democratic process".

The Accord showed the Filipino Muslims and the Islamic world that the new government was sincere in its intent to grant its people maximum participation in the so-called democratic space.

A Government With The Pulse Of The People

From April 1986 to May 1987, the government and the MNLF Panel held a series of dialogues for mutually acceptable proposals. Ambassador Emmanuel N. Pelaez headed the Mindanao Peace and Development Panel.

While this was happening, the Constitutional Commission was making its own grassroots consultation. It also used the Tripoli Agreement, a document drafted in the previous administration, as primary reference in drafting the provision for the creation of an autonomous region in Mindanao.

On February 1987, the new Philippine Constitution enshrined the aspirations of the Filipino Muslims to manage their own affairs according to their customs, beliefs, and traditions.

As a clincher, the Constitution called on Congress to pass, within 18 months of its organization, an Organic Act creating the autonomous region and defining its basic structure of government, with the assistance of a special, multisectoral body called the Regional Consultative Commission.

Even while Congress was still deliberating on the bill for the creation of the Mindanao Regional Consultative Commission (MRCC), the people in the concerned

areas were already busy looking for the right representatives to constitute the special body.

There was happy anticipation among the Muslims as they braced themselves for this fresh turn of history.

Consulting The People

Multisectoral meetings were conducted from October 1987 to February 1988 in the 27 districts of the 12 provinces proposed to be incorporated in the autonomous region. Nominees from each district were screened and interviewed. By the time Congress passed the MRCC Bill on March 11, 1988, there was already a carefully prepared roster of nominees. By June, the Commission on Appointments had confirmed the appointment of 51 members to the MRCC.

The cross-section of Mindanao society was aptly reflected in the MRCC, half of whom were Muslims. Among these Muslim commissioners were former secessionist commanders. The MNLF commanders were Nasrodin Tan Dacula from Maguindanao and Amilpasa Bandaying and Dambong Sali who were both Tausugs and Mama S. Lalanto who was a Maranao commander from the MILF.

The task of putting into concrete and precise terms the aspirations of Filipino Muslims in Mindanao officially began when the MRCC convened on March 26, 1988 in Cotabato City where the President swore in the commissioners. The first Plenary Session was held with Peace Commissioner Alfredo R.A. Bengzon as the interim presiding officer.

Zamboanga City became the venue for the second and third plenary sessions where, on April 11-19, 1988, caucuses were held to elect the officers and draw up the house rules. Commissioner Tocod Macaraya became chairman of the officers which had the right mix of Muslims, Christians, and highlanders.

From April 20 to July 1988, public consultations became very extensive. Local government officials and nongovernment organizations actively participated in these

fora. The MRCC committees deliberated on the issues such as the definition of the term "Muslim Mindanao", the issues on ancestral domain, land reform, the regional security force, the benefits to be gained from autonomy, and the matter of revenue-sharing.

Aside from the local consultations, regional consultations were also conducted within the year in strategic urban centers like Puerto Princesa City (July 9), Zamboanga City (July 22), Marawi City (July 31-August 1), Cotabato City (August 2-3), and General Santos City (August 4-5).

The issues generated the interest of the majority of the Mindanao populace. There was a strong clamor for the draft organic act to be presented to the people first before the MRCC submits it to Congress.

Congress also created the joint House and Senate Ad Hoc Committee and met with the MRCC in Zamboanga City on September 3- 4, 1988 to look into the progress of the Commission's work.

The Commission members realized their duty not only to search for options to assist in the shaping of the future of Mindanao but also to preserve and maintain the unity and integrity of the Filipino nation. Not that it was easy. Serious disagreements among the commissioners over controversial issues prevented them to complete the draft of the organic act.

However, the final report, containing 18 committee reports and two with proper notations, submitted to the House and the Senate passed the second reading. From this point, the task of coming up with an organic act was in the hands of Congress.

Congress also demonstrated the democratic processes in the formulation of the act by conducting consultations not only between the two chambers, but also between the legislative and the executive branches of the government.

The proposed law generated much public interest which led to the filing of a case before the Supreme Court raising the issue as to whether its ratification will depend on double or single majority.

In the case of *Abbas et al vs. COMELEC et al*, the Supreme Court in an en banc resolution dated November 10, 1989 unanimously ruled that: "If the framers of the Constitution intended to require approval by a majority of all votes cast in the plebiscite, they would have so indicated . . . The creation of the autonomous region is made to depend, not on the total majority vote in the plebiscite, but on the will of the majority in each of the constituent units".

Finally, after nine months of work, on August 1, 1989, Congress enacted into law Republic Act 6734 entitled "An Act Providing For An Organic Act For The Autonomous Region In Muslim Mindanao".

The people of Mindanao would now decide on it for the sake of their future and that of the Republic's.

Voice Of The People

The Administration's position of "active neutrality" attracted criticisms. But it maintained its stance that the issue of autonomy, a fundamental change in the political arrangements of the citizens, must not be treated along partisan, political lines. To ensure that the people affected were fully informed before they cast their decisions, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) conducted a thorough information campaign on the proposed Organic Act.

Republic Act 6734 was submitted for ratification to the people of Mindanao in November 1989. Four provinces opted to join the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM): Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao. None of the cities voted for autonomy. The will of the people was made known and asserted.

The democratic process had won.

The ARMM had become the concrete manifestation of a peaceful political solution to a national problem that could have otherwise diminished the Republic of

the Philippines into a disunited and chaotic country. And now it must translate itself into a meaningful and stable structure responsive to the needs of its constituents.

On February 17, 1990, the ARMM conducted its first elections for their regional officials. Major national and local political parties fielded their candidates for the following positions: regional governor, vice governor, and 21 seats in the regional assembly.

Zacaria A. Candao, as governor, and Benjamin T. Loong, as vice governor, were proclaimed by the COMELEC as the new officials of the autonomous region.

Governor Candao, in 1976, served as legal adviser to the MNLF. A Maguindanaoan, Candao was also a member of the MNLF during the negotiations in Libya of the Tripoli Agreement.

After EDSA, a number of Muslim leaders which included Candao and Loong pledged their allegiance to the Republic. And now they were on the threshold of genuine self-rule.

Start Of Self-Rule

On July 9, 1990, Candao took his oath of office before the President as the first Regional Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This marked the formal establishment and organization of the Autonomous Regional Government (ARG). Upon the leadership of the autonomous government, the task of creating the Office of the ARG and the transfer of specific powers and functions from the national to the new regional government, as provided by law, came into effect.

An Oversight Committee headed by the Executive Secretary was created to supervise the transfer of powers vested on the new regional government by the Organic Act. The Committee was also tasked to oversee the transfer of appropriations, properties, assets and liabilities, and personnel of national agencies devolved to the ARG; and, to identify other line agencies and government-owned and control-

led corporations (GOCCs) that may be absorbed by the regional government. The tasks included overseeing the terms and conditions of the turnovers.

On July 24, 1990, Candao and Ismael Abubakar Jr., the Speaker of the Regional Assembly, met with the Oversight Committee to discuss the process of devolution of these agencies from the national government to the Autonomous Regional Government. Candao was concerned about the orderly transfer of powers of the line agencies so as not to disrupt the delivery of public services.

The Oversight Committee (OC) was composed of then Executive Secretary Catalino Macaraig, then Secretary Guillermo Carague of Budget, Candao, Abubakar, Senators Mike Tamano and Nene Pimentel, and Congressmen Arden Anni and Guimid Matalam.

The Technical Working Group (TWG) was constituted to thresh out the nitty-gritties of the tasks that will have to be carried out by the Committee. The Head of the Presidential Management Staff (PMS) was elected the Chairman of the TWG and the members were the representatives appointed by the members of the OC.

On October 12, 1990, the President signed four Executive Orders aimed at providing the ARG in Muslim Mindanao the powers and resources needed for its operations and for infrastructure development.

Devolved to the ARG were the powers, functions, assets, equipment, personnel, and budget of line agencies dealing with local government (DLG), social services (DSWD), science and technology (DOST), labor and employment (DOLE), environment and natural resources (DENR), tourism (DOT), public works and highways (DPWH), and barter trade operations.

The Face Of A Regional Government In Mindanao

The powers and functions of the Autonomous Regional Government were all-encompassing. It was vested with powers to exercise jurisdiction over matters covering administrative organization; creation of sources of revenues; ancestral do-

main and natural resources; personal, family and property relations; regional, urban and rural planning and development; economic, social and tourism development; educational policies; preservation and development of the cultural heritage; and other powers.

The national government, however, maintained the last say on foreign affairs; national defense and security; postal service; coinage and fiscal and monetary policies; quarantine, customs and tariffs; citizenship, naturalization, immigration and deportation; general auditing, civil service and elections; foreign trade; maritime, land and air transportation and communications that affected areas outside the Autonomous Region; and patents, trademarks, tradenames, and copyrights.

Defining which areas of responsibilities overlapped and which did not required of the OC members infinite patience and wisdom. Centuries of struggle have at last arrived at a peaceful solution, thanks to Aquino and the carefully constituted group who could not afford to let history slip away – through one careless misstep.

The Organic Act provided that the powers of the Autonomous Regional Government be exercised through the Regional Governor and the Regional Legislative Assembly. It also called for the institutionalization of the Shariah Court system, in consideration of Muslim customs and culture.

The Executive power was vested in the Regional Governor who was assisted by nine Regional Cabinet members, four of whom were to come from cultural communities. There was also a Regional Vice Governor.

The Regional Governor exercised control over all regional executive commissions, boards, bureaus, and offices including local government units within the ARMM. During the Aquino presidency, he was supervised only by the President of the Philippines, thus enjoying a direct relationship with the highest office in the country.

No other governor in the country had this direct relationship with the President, all were supervised through the Secretary of Local Government.

The Autonomous Code also set to establish a system of tribal courts, which were to include a Tribal Appellate Court for the indigenous cultural communities in the Autonomous Region. These courts were to settle matters involving personal, family, and property rights according to the tribal codes of these communities.

Candao says: "...in the past, one administration after another had resorted to many forms of strategies to deny the Muslims their quest for self-rule and autonomy. This is the only administration that has recognized the aspirations of the Muslims".

The Autonomous Act also enabled the Autonomous Region to raise its own resources to support its programs. It had the power to raise revenues from local taxes, fees and charges, appropriations, donations, endowments, foreign assistance, and other forms of aids, subject to the Constitution and national policies.

Upon the recommendation of the Oversight Committee, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao were to be given seed money of P615 million for an infrastructure package for five years starting 1991. Additional assistance to be sourced from the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the national government would be granted to the Autonomous Region on a program proposal basis. On top of these, national programs and projects in the Autonomous Region would continue to be financed out of national funds.

The Culture Factor

Aside from those mentioned above, the Organic Act clothed the Autonomous Regional Government with substantial powers to shape the life of the people in the region according to their culture and peculiarities.

To protect the rights of the indigenous cultural communities with respect to ancestral land, the Organic Act provided that the Regional Government shall implement and enforce the customary laws, traditions, and practices of the indigenous cultural communities on land claims and ownership and settlement of land disputes. Moreover, the Autonomous Regional Government was granted the power to enact its own version of Agrarian Reform provided it was consistent with the na-

tional policy. The Regional Assembly passed a resolution suspending the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law in their area, but this was overruled by the OC.

The Organic Act also mandated the Autonomous Regional Government to formulate its own urban and rural development plan. For this purpose, a Regional Planning and Development Board was created with private sector participation, in emulation of the government-private sector tie-ups set by the President.

The regional government was also granted the power to exercise, control, and supervise the exploration, utilization, and development of the natural resources within its jurisdiction. The regional government was also granted substantial authority to regulate foreign investments in its area.

The preservation and development of the cultural heritage of the people in the Autonomous Region was given due importance in the Organic Act, too. It called for the strengthening and development of the madrasah or Islamic teaching in the Autonomous Region.

The Regional Government was also empowered to evolve its own low-cost housing program, promote the well-being of women and the youth, and protect the rights of labor.

Public Order And Security

The Autonomous Regional Government had a share in the responsibility of keeping the peace in the region. Towards this end, the Regional Assembly was to create, by law, a Regional Police Force which shall form an integral part of the Philippine National Police under the administration and control of the National Police Commission.

While the defense and security of the Autonomous Region remained to be the responsibility of the National Government, a regional command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for the Autonomous Region was set up.

What then did these efforts signify?

In a nutshell, while the government adhered to the spirit of the Tripoli Agreement and used it as a general framework of the Organic Act, the government, in establishing meaningful autonomy in Muslim Mindanao, went beyond it by adding new provisions which strengthened the structure of the regional government and armed it with more substantive powers and resources for effective governance.

It may be too early to tell, but the strife in Mindanao may have come to pass. President Aquino pursued the process of peace with sincerity and determination. Again, the vision was put into work.

Meanwhile, up north in the Cordilleras in Luzon, another group of Filipinos with a heritage and history of distrust for the lowlands was also clamoring for autonomy. To this, the President responded with dispatch.

The Cordilleras: A Shot At Autonomy

On September 13, 1986, noontime, the President's chopper lifted from the Malacanañ grounds and headed towards north to meet with Fr. Conrado Balweg, romantically dubbed by the press as the Rebel Priest. In a little over 30 minutes, the chopper and its escorts hovered over towering pine trees and the Mt. Data Lodge. The thick fog which covered the area a few hours before had lifted.

Fr. Conrado Balweg greeted the President with profuse warmth. He gifted the President with a shield and spear - his part of the *alasiw*, the exchange of peace tokens which signified the *sipat*, the cessation of hostilities. The President gave Balweg a Bible and a rosary.

The exchange of peace tokens at Mt. Data ushered in the start of the Cordillera peace talks.

The Cordillera region broke into the nation's political consciousness in the mid-70s when they expressed opposition to the government plan to set up a series of dams along the Chico River in the Kalinga-Apayao area.

The Chico Dam project was opposed by the people since it would result in the destruction and inundation of ancestral lands. It was seen as an attempt to impose a central government decision without considering the views of the residents in the affected area. Moreover, the project was resented since the hydroelectric energy that would be generated would benefit mainly the population of the lowlands, bringing little benefit to the communities that would be displaced.

The awakening of the Kalinga tribe stirred similar sentiments among other natives in the Cordillera region. The Tingguians in the province of Abra, led by Balweg, waged a resistance against the Cellophil Resources Corporation timber project which was seen by the highlanders as an attempt by the lowland businessmen to exploit the natural resources of the area with little benefit accruing to the natives and, in the process, destroy the environment. Elsewhere in Apayao, Mt. Province, Ifugao, Benguet, and the City of Baguio, the fervor snowballed and the crusade for a unified cry for autonomy started.

In both instances, the efforts to push through with the projects were accompanied by repressive measures enforced by the military. A revered *pangat* (village chieftain), Macli-ing Dulag, was killed on April 24, 1980. In a number of cases, persons opposing the projects were summarily arrested, a number reportedly tortured by military and police authorities. And in some instances, persons were killed under mysterious circumstances.

These developments led to the rise of insurgency in the region. The Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, successfully moved into the Cordillera Region to assist the various tribes in their resistance movements. The Cordilleras became heavily militarized at the peak of the anti-Chico dam struggle. Up to this writing, the NPA has a foot in the area but has difficulty establishing a wide and deep base due to the unique culture of the people and their conservative nature. The NPA is viewed as an outside force, consisting principally of lowlanders who are trying to gain a foothold in the ancestral lands of the Cordilleras.

Autonomy became the call of the unified natives of the Cordilleras in the 80s. Larger mobilizations against the Chico River Dam Project led to the organization of

the militant *pangats* and the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA), an urban-based umbrella of more than 100 cause-oriented groups in the region. These groups put the campaign for autonomy into high gear. Linking up with traditional leaders in rural areas and merging more modern organizational methods with traditional cultural forms, the CPA launched an organized agitation for genuine autonomy in 1985.

But the people-powered presidency toppled the central government in Manila in 1986. The political equation changed. The new President had promised democratic reforms and the people of the Cordilleras waited in silence.

Laying The Groundwork

The President had authorized Agapito "Butz" Aquino (who later became Senator) to initiate talks with the group of Balweg, the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA), to seek for peaceful solutions to the smouldering problem. At the same time, other groups were invited to participate in the peace initiatives and to put forth proposals for the future of the Cordilleras. Thus was formed the Cordillera Broad Coalition (CBC) which was made up of sectoral representatives, local government appointees, concerned individuals, and middle-class professionals.

In November 1986, a Covenant of Unity was forged among the CBA-CPLA, CBC, and LGUs at Mt. Data. Together, they requested the government to cancel the Chico River Dam Project, to create an Interim Cordillera Administrative Region (ICAR), and to continue the dialogue even after the ceasefire and after the regionalization of the Cordilleras.

The President moved quickly. She cancelled the Chico Dam project in Kalinga-Apayao, Mountain Province and revoked the license of the Cellophil Resources Corporation in Abra.

Then the government made it possible for the Cordillera people to prepare themselves for autonomy by providing for the systems and structures that gave Cordillerans the options for self-government.

The Constitution of 1987 was very explicit on the establishment of a Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR). As said on Article X, Section 15: "There shall be created autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras consisting of provinces, cities, municipalities and geographical areas sharing common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, economic and social structures, and other relevant characteristics within the framework of this Constitution and the national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines".

"Indeed, the political trend during the [first] three years (1986-1989) of the Aquino Administration has shown and afforded more avenues for the continuous political awakening of the Cordillera people. Compared to the past regimes which caused more alienation of the Cordillera communities, i.e. driving many of them to the underground movement, the Aquino government has launched a series of initiatives that somehow address the historical problems of the Cordillera people" wrote Dr. Maximo Garming, a U.P. professor who is himself a Cordilleran, in his paper, 'Towards Understanding the Cordillera Autonomous Region' ".

The institution of the CAR did not come easy. Sociocultural differences became pronounced while political strategies came into conflict.

But the government negotiating panel headed by Ambassador Emmanuel Pelaez kept away from the intramurals and faced only those who were willing to tackle the difficult task of laying the foundation for an autonomous region.

On June 9, 1987, Pelaez and the Cordillera negotiating panel, headed by Abrino Aydinan who was acting for the CBA-CPLA, announced in Baguio that an agreement had been reached on an Interim Cordillera Regional Administration (ICRA) as part of the overall peace talks.

Divergence In Approaches

The CBC people walked out. It accused the government of favoring Balweg. Later, the CBC disassociated itself from the CBA-CPLA saying that "no one individual or group can claim copyright or patent to the definition of a Cordillera

Autonomous Region". It objected most vehemently against the formation of a "regional peacekeeping force" between the CPLA, the AFP, and other government offices without the participation of the regional groups in the Cordillera. It also scored CBA for its "divide-and-rule" tactics wherein it dangled favors in the CAR to individuals and groups in exchange for their support.

Another source of conflict between the CBC and the CBA/CPLA was the insistence of the latter to prescribe the *bodong*, an indigenous political institution in certain parts of the Cordilleras, as the form of government of the region.

Traditional politicians also contributed to the ruckus.

These leaders, notably Congressmen William Claver (Kalinga-Apayao), Gualberto Lumaig (Ifugao), Samuel Dangwa (Benguet), Victor Dominguez (Mt. Province), and Honorato Aquino (Baguio City) strongly advocated a regional administration similar to those already existing in the other regions of the country. Further, these officials also objected to the usage of some indigenous terms such as *pangat* and *bodong* and complained about undue advantage given to CBA and CPLA.

Finally, in July 1987, the President signed into law Executive Order No. 220, which created the Cordillera Administrative Region. The CAR was to be composed of the provinces of Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga-Apayao, and Mt. Province and the chartered city of Baguio. This law "reunited" the Cordillera provinces which were previously divided into the Ilocos and Cagayan Valley regions.

After the release of E.O. 220, public protests were mounted by the CBC and the Cordillera People's Alliance (a left of center group operating in the Cordillera). In a statement, the CBC questioned the "immediate implementation of E.O. 220 which imposes neither an autonomous nor administrative Cordillera region whose structures, composition, process or function is unclear or known only to the same so-called negotiating panels".



President Aquino receives a souvenir from the people of Bongao, Tawi-Tawi during her second visit to the province on May 15, 1989. She is the only Philippine President to visit the province twice. At right is Sen. Santanina Rasul.



President Aquino breaks protocol and personally meets with Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF on September 5, 1986 in Sulu. With the President were Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile, AFP Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, Maj. Gen. Jose Magno, and Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Mamintal Tamano. The President is shown in photo with Nur Misuari on her left and Nur's wife, Desdemona, on her right.



On September 13, 1986, a little over a week after meeting with Misuari, President Aquino meets with 'Rebel Priest' Conrado Balweg of the CPLA in Bontoc, Mountain Province. With her during the meeting are Secretaries Ernesto Maceda, Juan Ponce Enrile, and Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos. Balweg is one with microphone.



Balweg said he 'only trusted Cory.' President Aquino meets with him at the Dining Room of the Presidential Guest House in Malacañang to discuss programs for the Cordilleras.



The President before Chief Justice Claudio Teehankee swearing her allegiance to the New Constitution on February 11, 1987. Holding the Bible is President's daughter Ballsy Cruz.

Receiving a copy of the Constitution, while Vice President Salvador Laurel and Concom President Cecilia Muñoz Palma look on.





President Aquino expresses her thanks to a group of Muslim leaders, led by former Lanao del Sur Gov. Ali Dimaporo (left of the President), who called on her on January 29, 1987 to pledge all-out support for 1986 Constitution.



The President meets with the provincial governors on August 22, 1988. At left, in barong, is DILG Secretary Luis Santos.



MORE TEETH. President Aquino meets with members of Region XI Development Council (RDC-XI) headed by Atty. Chito Ayala on November 20, 1987 in Malacañang.

RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE. The President and her children Pinky (left) and Viel (right) fill up their ballots at the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Elementary School in San Miguel, Tarlac on January 18, 1988.



Members of the legislative led
by Senate President Jovito
Salonga and House Speaker
Ramon Mitra witness the
signing of the Local Govern-
ment Code on October 10, 1991.





Addressing newly-elected
governors and mayors in March
1988 at the Philippine Interna-
tional Convention Center.



ON TO PEACE. The President pins a medal of valor on a soldier who was wounded during a confrontation with Muslim secessionists during her visit to Jolo, Sulu on September 5, 1986.



TRANSITIONS. The President exchanges pleasantries with (from left) DILG Secretary Cesar Sariño, Executive Secretary Franklin Drilon (partly hidden) and former DND Secretary Fidel V. Ramos at the National Symposium on the 1991 Local Government Code at the PICC on February 24, 1992.



The President, Senate President Salonga, DFA Secretary Raul Manglapus listen to speech of Governor Zacaria Candao during the launching of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.



DEVOLUTION. The President signs Executive Order devolving power to the regions while Candao assists.

The Cordillera negotiating panel, on the other hand, defended the issuance of E.O. 220. They stressed "that the establishment of the CAR recognizes and sympathizes with our inherent right and desire for autonomy, self-government and self-determination. The purpose for which the CAR was formed, its scope of authority and responsibility and its powers and functions all point to the path we must take to achieve complete self-rule".

The Presidential Management Staff (PMS), in coordination with the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), launched a massive information campaign to create awareness on CAR and the setting up of its structures. Furthermore, through the assistance of local experts and elders in the region, PMS conducted a research to identify the different ethnolinguistic and tribal groups in the Cordilleras which will be represented in the CAR structures.

Crafting The Organic Act

As provided in E.O. 220, the Cordillera Regional Assembly was created to serve as the policy-formulating body of CAR. The Assembly was composed of 250 representatives from the tribes, the municipalities, and Baguio City, including non-government organizations (NGOs) in the CAR.

Public consultations were held in all the provinces and city of CAR to inform the people of the nomination process for the Assembly. Tribal groups and indigenous political institutions were encouraged to nominate their representatives. Likewise, NGOs, and barangay and municipal councils nominated individuals to represent them in the CAR. All the nominees were screened by PMS and a short list was submitted to the Cordillera Panel for endorsement to the President.

Atty. Sergio Kawi was appointed by the President as the Chairman of the Assembly and was also designated as the titular head of the CAR.

E.O. 220 also provided for the creation of the Cordillera Executive Board (CEB), the development body and implementing arm of the CAR, to be composed of the

governors of the provinces of the CAR, the Mayor of Baguio City, six representatives of the CBA, the ethnolinguistic groups, and NGOs.

Upon the assumption of office of the CEB members, the PMS assisted the CEB in setting up its office in Baguio. The PMS, together with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), also assisted the CEB in linking with government line agencies in the region.

On September 23, 1987, the President issued Administrative Order No. 36, establishing regional offices of the national government in the CAR to facilitate the delivery of government services there. Among the noteworthy provisions of A.O. 36 is the preference extended to Cordillerans in the filling-up of positions in CAR line agencies.

As provided for in the Constitution, an organic act for the Cordillera shall be drafted to define the basic structure of government for the region.

The Cordillera Regional Consultative Commission (CRCC) was created by virtue of Republic Act No. 6658 on June 10, 1988 to draft and assist Congress in the formulation of the Organic Act for the Cordillera Autonomous Region.

It had 29 commissioners selected by a panel from the Office of the President headed by then Department of Finance (DOF) Undersecretary Ramon Katigbak. The commissioners were chosen from nominees and applicants whose main qualification was that he/she must be a knowledgeable Cordilleran. The PMS, also a member of the panel, conducted a thorough research and investigation on the applicants. Chosen to serve in the Commission was Abrino Aydinan, who was elected as its Chairman.

The CBC lost much of its independent stance when its leaders and members were drawn into the CEB and now, the Commission.

In July 1988, the Commission started to conduct consultations with their constituents. They listened to Cordillera elders, women, farmers, minors, and the youths.

After apparently taking heed of their views, the draft of the proposed Organic Act was completed by the Commission on December 21, 1988. The 29 members except Dr. Amelia Miranda voted in the affirmative for approval and submission of the draft to Congress. Republic Act No. 6766, an act providing for an organic act for the Cordillera Autonomous Region, was approved on October 23, 1989.

Finally, on January 1990, the plebiscite on the Organic Act was held in the CAR provinces.

But the people turned it down. The votes showed the rejection of the proposed organic act by the City of Baguio and by four out of five CAR provinces. Ifugao was the only province that voted favorably on this act.

Back To The Drawing Table

On February 14, 1990, the COMELEC issued Resolution No. 2259 stating that the Organic Act for the Cordillera Autonomous Region constituted only the province of Ifugao. This was concurred by a Department of Justice (DOJ) memorandum reiterating that Ifugao alone, can legally and validly constitute the Cordillera Autonomous Region.

On February 5, 1990, then Executive Secretary Catalino Macaraig Jr. issued a memorandum which granted authority to wind-up the affairs of the CRA and the CEB. Congress also enacted Republic Act 6861, setting the elections in the Cordillera Autonomous Region.

In December 1990, the Supreme Court gave the government a jolt when it ruled that the lone province of Ifugao can not constitute an autonomous region and declared that the CAR would have to revert back to the structures outlined in E.O. 220.

In the light of the Supreme Court's decision, the government was faced with the difficult task of restoring the structures that existed under E.O. 220. But some

saw this as a cleansing process. The Assembly and the CEB were reconstituted with new members.

On February 16, 1992 reappointed CRA Chairman Atty. Sergio Kawi, the reconstituted CEB with new members, notably Fr. Balweg and Joel Obar of the CBA, took their oath of office before the President. The CEB and CRA became fully operational.

The CAR again operated under the same setup it had in 1987. The autonomy dream remained to be a goal for the Cordillerans. But former Secretary Rafael Ileto encouraged thus, "The Cordillera dream is not beyond reach. You ought to continue a consensus-building for a new organic act".

As of this writing, the CEB and CRA are facing the difficult task of rewriting the Cordillera organic act – one which would be acceptable to the different tribes and cross-sections of society in the Cordillera. For the first time in their existence, the two bodies are closely working – holding meetings more frequently, gathering feedbacks, and embarking on joint projects. They aim to come up with a rewritten organic act for presentation to their people by the end of 1992.

Whatever happens, President Aquino had expressed it time and again: the people's fate is in their hands.

Regional Development Councils

THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS (RDCs) were envisioned to be bodies responsible for preparing and updating long-range as well as annual development plans for the regions. They were also meant to be the go-between of the national government and the LGUs. This setup was conceived to effect bottom-up planning process.

The RDCs is an old concept. But saying that it worked is an entirely different matter.

The RDCs were institutionalized by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) in 1972. Supposed to coordinate the implementation and to monitor development activities, they failed because the previous dispensation exerted a strong influence over the planning and implementation of development projects.

The RDC Executive Committee was an irritant in the political gambit of the old regime. After all, during those times, development projects were confused with the dispensation of favors.

The old RDC and its Chairman had no formal authority and moral back-up from the former presidency over the representatives of regional agencies of national departments or the representatives of LGUs. As such, the RDCs became hapless

watchers of the plans and programs undertaken by sectoral agencies and LGUs. Without visible clout, the RDC failed to attract the people, the NGOs, and the private sector to join its activities. Sadly, the RDCs proved to be futile.

In addition, the RDCs were saddled with the problem of lack of technical or planning expertise. In the end, this role was done by the NEDA regional offices.

Aquino Recasts RDC

The Aquino administration set a quiet revolution in governance – one which reposed great trust on the capability of her people to work directly for their dreams. The role of the administration was to provide the structures and the instrumentalities with which the people could work with.

One of the government entities that was evaluated and reshaped was the RDC. In November 1987, the President issued Executive Order No. 308, making RDCs as the "primary institutions in the region which shall set the direction of economic and social development".

Unlike the paper tiger RDCs of the previous administration, President Aquino's RDC had flesh and had clout.

This issuance defined the RDC members and prescribed that one-fourth of the composition was to come from representatives of the private sector. This move was meant to involve the wider participation of the private sector in regional planning. This move was foreseen to make the RDC capture both the sectoral and areal approaches to planning.

The first batch of RDC Chairmen appointed by President Aquino consisted of outstanding governors, regional directors, and a representative from the NGO sector. Among them were Governors Lito Osmena (Region VII), Lutgardo Barbo (Region VIII), Antonio Gallardo (Region X), Roberto Pagdanganan (Region III), Rafael Colet (Region I), Director Vicente Lopez (Region II), and Atty. Jesus Ayala (Region XI).

The RDCs assumed critical roles. One such role was their budgeting function. They adopted the Synchronized Planning- Programming and Budgeting System (SPPBS). This system gave due recognition to the provinces to determine which projects in their area needed most attention. Starting 1990, budget had been determined at the regional level.

The Aquino budget, which had been criticized by detractors as being excessive, was actually a reflection of the people's true needs.

The RDC, in any given area, had the power to say yes or no on any proposed development project.

RDC Broader Power

In addition, the RDCs were given broader powers such as the administration of most of the integrated area development programs (IADPs) which used to be a function under the Office of the Prime Minister. Authority over the IADPs finances were also transferred to the RDCs.

The linkage of the RDC with the President and the heads of the national departments were also strengthened. The then Office of the Cabinet Secretary (OCS) further initiated an unprecedented step by institutionalizing the participation of all RDC Chairmen to the monthly meetings of CORDs with the President. Through these regular meetings, the RDCs were able to call the attention of the President and the Cabinet on practically any major subject which were of great importance to the former. These meetings also served as venue for feedback necessary in the review and formulation of policies and programs.

The RDCs also organized Problem Solving Sessions with the President through the assistance of the then OCS and, at times, the Presidential Management Staff.

Part of the linkage to the Office of the President is the participation of PMS in the RDC meetings in an observer status. Items taken up during the RDC meetings were immediately reported to the Office of the President. In fact, some projects/

programs the RDCs cited as their priorities were immediately acted upon by the President.

In such manner did the Aquino administration strengthen the RDCs. The Councils had been transformed into catalysts of growth. They were no longer mere extensions of the national government to the people. On the contrary, they became the extensions of the people to their government.

Local Government Code

FOR MANY YEARS, Philippine political power had been concentrated in the national government, an orientation that were fossils of our colonial past. The national government was the humungous blob gorging on the wealth and resources of its nation, while its people partook of the morsels that were never enough to sustain the life of, much less energize, their respective communities.

The national government controlled the purse of the nation. Like monarchs, it took all the revenues into its vault and dispensed it only as they saw fit. Community planning came from the top, from the central government, masticated and washed down into the bowels that were the local governments.

The state of affairs was such that the local government units had to stretch meager resources to deliver basic services to the people. The leaders had to look to the central government for adequate infrastructure, health care, and agricultural support services. They had to scramble for ambulances, communication facilities, allotments for irrigation and barangay roads, and such.

The situation only perpetuated the system of patronage. Local governments, oftentimes, were deprived of self-determination, responsibility, and respect.

As a consequence, communities particularly in the rural areas, stagnated. The populace became restive.

In response, the Aquino government encouraged and supported the organization of cooperatives to improve the economic plight of the rural folk. It encouraged the participation of the nongovernment organizations in running numerous government projects, to widen the involvement of the private sector. As a third canto, the leadership saw that it was time to give the local governments more power and access to the country's resources.

The President then certified as priority bill the Local Government Code. But perhaps, many congressmen saw that it would give local governments more access to resources. Ergo, power. The bill gathered dust in Congress for five years.

But slowly, the political landscape began to change with the President's relentless, indefatigable campaign of tapping the grassroots, of linking with the rural folk and NGOs.

Furthermore, the President met regularly with the mayors, the governors, and their constituents. She called on them in planning sessions.

De Facto Devolution

On May 30, 1988, the Aquino government created the Cabinet Action Committee on Decentralization (CACD) to study how certain additional powers and responsibilities could be devolved to local government units.

The President appointed the DBM Secretary as Chairman of the CACD with the following as members: Secretaries of DLG, DOF, DPWH, DECS, DOTC, DOLE, DA, and the PMS head.

The Committee subsequently launched the Pilot Decentralization Project which was aimed at addressing the problems of red tape and delay in the delivery of services by transferring administrative and budgetary responsibilities to the local

governments of four pilot provinces namely, Tarlac, Laguna, Negros Occidental, and Davao del Norte. The President herself chose these four provinces to be models of the project.

The governors of the four provinces worked closely with the committee and hammered out agreements that were considered a breakthrough in managing local governments. The provincial governments were allowed to implement budgets without prior approval from the Budget Office. They were allowed to purchase equipment and vehicles and hire personnel without getting the nod of the central government. The President granted each of the four pilot provinces P120 million for development projects. Again, this act of faith spurred further growth to the provinces.

The President also directed the secretaries and heads of line agencies to delegate more duties and authority to regional directors for them to be able to respond to local problems more quickly and efficiently.

People power institutionalized, with or without Congress imprimatur, became moot and academic.

Finally on October 1991, Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991 was signed into law by the President.

The Local Government Code At Last

The Code aimed to enable local government units (LGUs) to attain their fullest development as self-reliant communities and make them more effective partners in the attainment of national goals. It gave them more powers, authority, responsibilities, and resources.

"Devolution" was the key word. The Code mandated that national government agencies must transfer functions, responsibilities, and eventually facilities, records, equipment, assets, and personnel to LGUs.

The shift of power is awesome. But such is the spirit of the EDSA revolution.

The local governments were to assume the delivery of basic services and facilities in the following areas: agricultural support services; health and social welfare services including maintenance of hospitals, health centers and day-care centers; general hygiene and sanitation, beautification, and solid waste collection; maintenance of roads and bridges; local infrastructure intended primarily to serve the residents; community forest projects; and more.

The devolution was to undergo an orderly and systematic process. For 1992, eight national agencies greatly affected by this new management of government were to turn over their personnel, records and equipment to the LGUs. These departments included the Departments of Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, Health, Public Works and Highways, Social Welfare, Tourism, and Transportation and Communication.

The ramifications of this power shift on the government employees was far-reaching. To protect the personnel, the President issued Executive Order No. 503 which stated that "no involuntary separation, termination, or lay-off of permanent personnel of national government agencies affected by the devolution" shall take place and, further "there shall be no diminution in pay or benefits of devolved personnel".

EO 503 provided a clear cut answer to the fears of many government employees that many of them would be laid-off as a result of the Code. The EO gave them security of tenure and the appropriate benefits.

Building Strength

The basic services and facilities were to be funded from the share of the LGUs in the proceeds of national taxes and other local revenues and funding support from the national government, its instrumentalities, and government-owned or -controlled corporations.

On February 24, 1992, the President issued Executive Order No. 507 directing the transfer of the amounts appropriated in the 1992 General Appropriations Act

for devolved services and facilities, projects, and activities of affected national government agencies and departments to the IRA of the LGUs.

One of the significant features of the Code was that the LGUs were given greater share in the national wealth. Upon the effectivity of the Code, the LGUs were to have greater share in the national internal revenue taxes.

The share of LGUs in the national wealth were to be appropriated by their respective *sanggunians* to finance local development projects. And as an additional benefit, LGUs were to be given the power to adjust rates prescribed by the Code, with certain restrictions.

In cases where a town fails to meet its target revenues and may affect the delivery of services, the national government may come in to subsidize it.

The Code had a unique provision that gave more room for resources for LGUs that are located in areas that can help provide energy for the nation. A barangay, for instance, which plays hosts to a hydrothermal, geothermal and other source of energy facility would be given substantive discounts in its cost of electricity.

The Code recognized that the target beneficiaries of decentralization were the people and that their involvement in local governance was vital to ensuring that local autonomy works to their best interests. Thus, the Code mandated LGUs to back-up people's organizations (POs) and NGOs to become active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy. It broadened and strengthened the development roles of NGOs and the private sector. It welcomed the private sector in the local legislative and policy-making bodies, such as representation and membership in the *sanggunians*, the local development council, local school board, local health board, and the local prequalification bids and awards committees.

More significantly, the Code gave preferential treatment to cooperatives and small fisherfolk. Concerned *sanggunians* were mandated to prioritize cooperatives in leasing public utilities owned by the LGUs and in granting franchises for the establishment and operations of ferries, wharves, markets, and slaughterhouses.

The Sangguniang Bayan was also mandated to prioritize small fisherfolk in granting fishing privileges such as building fish corrals, oyster, mussel or other aquatic beds. Finally, marginal fisherfolk would not be charged any fee for the right to fish in municipal waters.

Truly, the Local Government Code of 1991 freed the LGUs from the limitations of a centralized form of governance. By setting the framework for the devolution of powers from the national to the local levels, the Code concretized the aspirations of local officials and the people to run their localities as they deem fit.

However, the Code, which gave more power to local executives, was like a loaded gun. Used in the wrong manner by the wrong people, it could be a weapon for abuse as much as an instrument of change.

As pointed out by the President in her speech on February 24, 1992, on the occasion of the first National Symposium of the Local Government Code: "Greater powers mean greater responsibilities. This challenge to our local governments and leaders goes beyond exercising these powers prudently, within the parameters of the law. The challenge is to wield this new strength with a moral force, lashing out against temptations for abuse or misuse, delay or decay. For we have made the local government units our first line of defense, defense against underdevelopment, against curtailment of our freedoms. Thus the example of any one of you becomes a cue for all others to follow. Leadership is example. This is what public accountability means. This is what people power means".

Epilogue

ON MAY 11, 1992, the Filipino people trooped to the polls to elect the President's successor. The synchronized elections was a tremendous task for the populace, the media, and the concerned government instrumentalities. But in the end, the faith of Corazon Aquino in the capacity of the Filipinos to see the democratic exercise through with dignity was vindicated.

There were threats from the left and the right to disrupt the elections as well as attempts from a few to make a mockery of democracy's fundamental right. But the days of "guns, goons and gold" seemed to have breathed their last. The Filipino voters remained steadfast, vigilant, and unperturbed. The elections were said to have been the most peaceful, orderly, and honest in the history of the Republic. Just as President Aquino willed it to be. Just as how the Filipinos learned it should be.

Through its various interventions, the Aquino administration delivered power to the people – to the leaders, to people's organizations, to cultural communities, to the grassroots. For the first time, the people wielded real power to chart their own destinies and were energized by it.

With structures in place, and awareness ingrained in its people, the Philippines has become a showcase of democracy this side of the globe; where dictators shall never rise again. By making this possible, President Aquino gave her countrymen what may well be the greatest gift she can offer.